

HAMPTON AND RECONSTRUCTION

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Hampton and reconstruction by Edward L. Wells

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EDWARD L. WELLS

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RECONSTRUCTION**

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BY

EDWARD L. WELLS

Author of "Hampton and His Cavalry in '64"

"A Heart to resolve, a Head to contrive, and a Hand to execute."---Gibbon.

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PREFACE

I venture to ask a favor of the reader—that he do what I myself often shirk, it must be confessed—read this preface.

You would naturally infer from the title of this volume that it is the biography in part of a man whose career was very remarkable. So it is, but it is also—or is intended to be—something more. You may be inclined, at the first glance, to suppose that it can possess no interest for the present generation except as “ancient history.” If you will read the narrative, I think that you will find this first impression an error. This sketch is part of the biography of a people, the American people, at a most important period of its life. The past is the parent of the present and of the future of a people’s life, as it is with every man’s life. Hereditary inclinations, good and evil, influence a people’s career just as they influence that of an individual, and they should be equally subject to the guidance and restraint that experience imposes through conscience. Although this is an account of events happening many years ago, yet the causes producing them, at present in the background, are as full of vitality now as then—they are sleeping lions. Where treasure is, near at hand will always be lurking thieves. Because you may be sailing on summer-seas, free of care and with no thought of tempests, you do not doubt that the ocean, now so harmless-looking, will some time or other be lashed into angry waves mountain-high by blasts at present slumbering in the caves of the winds. So will the demon of storms reappear from time to time in your political summer-seas. You cannot prevent this by ignoring it, but you can save yourself from shipwreck by profiting by the experience of others. The miseries of Reconstruction were rendered possible only by the subversion of representative government—“the consent of the governed”—without which all government is simply despotism, however disguised. This thing can never again take place at the South under the same pretext—the negro—for that humbug has been exploded by the unanswerable logic of the

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reductio ad absurdum. But wily, unscrupulous politicians, hungering for plunder, will sooner or later manufacture other pretexts to "fool the people." Next time the North or West may become the scene of such planned wholesale burglary. When that time comes, the afflicted section will sorely need a political heir of the qualities of Hampton, and also sorely stand in need of the experience taught to the Southern people by their affliction.

It may perhaps be said that, granting all so far, the account of this period should be written only by one who has grown to manhood since its close, for he would write in a more "judicial spirit," as the phrase is, than an older man. But this view seems to me wrong, and a little reflection will convince anyone of its error. The keen interest that animates an observer of contemporary events stamps on his mind exact impressions of facts, and these impressions are durable as brass. If he be fairly intelligent and educated, and becomes an earnest, conscientious, lifelong student of the subjects involved with the facts graven on his mind, he is likely to arrive at approximately correct conclusions. On the other hand, a mere academician, cold, unimpassioned, totally inexperienced in the heartbeat of sympathy evoked by the personal sight of human misery, of "the agony and bloody sweat" of his fellowman, who undertakes to gather materials and impressions from lifeless, moldy volumes, nine-tenths of the contents of which consist of *ex parte* testimony from the side that was the stronger in numbers, is like an artist attempting to make a faithful portrait of a dead stranger by glancing at his corpse; or, rather, like a surgeon dissecting a cadaver and assuming to analyze and set down on paper all the glorious characteristics that the immortal soul, which formerly inhabited that now senseless clay, may have possessed. But when he who has been a personal observer of "times that tried men's souls" becomes conscious that he is an old man, standing on the verge of the grave, very well aware that he must soon render a truthful account of his stewardship, he finds that his own vain aspirations, animosities and prejudices fade away into nothingness, but that the noble, unalterable principles of right, the basic elements of the social compact,

loom up before his eyes in all their vast proportions. That man will not—dare not—misrepresent.

The responsibility for Reconstruction as carried out has been, so far as I know, ascribed only to negroes and carpet-baggers or to the refractory spirit of the South, unwilling to accept the legitimate results of the war. But neither of these had anything whatever to do with it except as deaf, dumb, blind instruments in other hands. It was not the outgrowth of racial antagonism, nor was it a war legacy. The cause was but the pirate's instinct of a few, deluding the many, to wreck the ship of state in order to plunder the cargo and rob the passengers; and this could be accomplished only by murdering the pilot, representative government. How and by whom the murderous dagger was used will be made clear by these pages. It will also be made clear how the State's resurrection from the grave was brought about by Wade Hampton, and that in the pacification of the entire country, in the restoration of fraternal feeling, no man's handiwork was so widely beneficent as his; that he was in the truest, most patriotic, most exalted, and most all-embracing sense of the term, a Union man.

E. L. W.

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CHAPTER FIRST

FAMILY, EARLY LIFE—CHARACTERISTICS—SECESSION

Statesman, yet friend to truth! of soul sincere,
In action faithful and in honor clear;
Who broke no promise, serv'd no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend.

—*Pope.*

Wade Hampton, the subject of this memoir, was born on March 28, 1818.

Before attempting to describe his personal characteristics, as exemplified by his career, or his individual antecedents, it is necessary, for a proper understanding of the man, to examine into his ancestry. This is not done here in the narrow spirit of the "family-dendrologist," for nothing is more worthless by itself

Than a successive title, long and dark,
Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's ark,

but because, like all others of the human race, he was the necessary product of hereditary traits far more than of the evolution of environment. His irrepressible instinct, as a soldier, to join in "freedom's battle once begun": his undying belief in representative government, so that "Give me liberty, or give me death" did not express to him merely a burst of fiery eloquence, but contained a solemn, sober conviction; these were as much parts of his natural self by inheritance as were the clear, calm, well-balanced mind, and amiable disposition, the exalted moral nature, and the magnificent physique, which he possessed.

Hampton first saw the light in his mother's former maiden-home in Charleston, S. C., where the mingled blood of Saxon and Celt, of Briton and Huguenot, had built up a civilization and culture inferior to none in America, or anywhere in the mother countries. But on his paternal side he came of that sturdy stock, large and vigorous in frame, active in mind and body, brave men, and true women, the Virginians, who did such patient work and gallant deeds in winning empire